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ABSTRACT

The oral literature of the Navajo people generally falls into two categories: the sacred stories and the folk tales, which often, but not always, point a moral. Sacred stories relate the Navajo's emergence history. These stories tell how the universe holds two kinds of people: the "Earth Surface People" (both living and dead) and the "Holy People" (powerful, mysterious beings that belong to the Sacred World). While the Holy People who travel on lightning, sunbeams, and rainbows are very powerful, they are not all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good. They make mistakes and have human emotions. They can be invoked, supplicated, propitiated, and coerced to help the people of the tribe, or to cease doing damage. The Holy People also serve as ideals of behavior for the Navajo people to follow or emulate. Although the sacred stories differ from story teller to story teller and from time to time, the outstanding lesson remains the same. Basic lessons taught by these stories are: the universe is a very dangerous place; to survive you must maintain order in those areas of life that you can control; avoid quarreling, avoid excess, and stay in harmony with your community and with nature; be wary of non-relatives; when in a new and dangerous situation, do nothing; and if the situation is really dangerous, escape. (AUTHOR/NQ)

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Navajo Wisdom and Traditions

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EVEN THOUGH THERE ARE SOME TWO HUNDRED NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES IN THE UNITED STATES, THEY SHARE THE SAME BASIC BELIEFS. THEIR TRADITIONS ARE SIMILAR -- THEIR LESSONS THE SAME. BECAUSE THE NATIVE AMERICAN LIVED AND LIVES CLOSE TO THE EARTH, DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS AND CLIMATES HAVE HAD THEIR EFFECTS ON THE STORIES.

EACH ENVIRONMENT PRODUCES A DIFFERENT KIND AND TYPE OF CHARACTER. THE ALASKAN ESKIMO BIRDS TAKE THE ROLES THAT NAVAJO ANIMALS TAKE IN OUR ORAL HISTORY. NAVAJO CLAN SYSTEMS DEVELOPED GEOGRAPHICALLY, AND THE CLANS ARE PLACE NAMES. EACH CLAN HAS A FAMILY STORY THAT CONCERNS THE RELATIONSH THE FAMILY HAD IN PRE-HISTORY WITH THE HOLY PEOPLE.

THOUGH GEOGRAPHICALLY IN A SIMILAR ENVIRONMENT TO OURS TODAY, THE HOPI CLANS ARE ANIMAL AND ASTRONOMIC I. E. THE BEAR CLAN, THE MOON CLAN, WHILE OURS ARE PLACE NAMES. PERHAPS TO EMPHASIZE THE LOCATIONS OF THE NAVAJO FAMILIES DURING A TIME OF NOMADIC TRAVEL FROM PLACE TO PLACE (AND

FROM WORLD TO WORLD.)

THE TRADITIONAL TRUTH AND HISTORY OF THE NAVAJO PEOPLE IS WOVEN THROUGH OUR DAILY LIFE AS THE DESIGN IN ONE OF OUR RUGS. THE COLORS AND THE PATTERNS OF THE STORIES ARE INSEPARABLE FROM THE FABRIC OF LIFE ITSELF. AND THE STORIES WERE AND ARE TRANSMITTED AS PART OF THE DAILY LIFE. THE CONVERSATIONS AND STORIES THAT GO ON DURING THE DAILY PROCESS DEFINE OUR WAY OF LIFE, EVEN AS WE LIVE IT.

THE STORIES AND TRADITIONS WERE DEVELOPED AND WERE REPEATED, WITH NO THOUGHT THAT SOMEDAY WOULD ALL BE HISTORY. AS TODAY, THERE IS NO THOUGHT THAT AS SUCH, WE ARE LIVING HISTORY, BUT THERE IS AN AWARENESS, THAT THIS IS THE WAY THINGS ARE DONE -- THE WAY THINGS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DONE. THERE IS ONE RIGHT WAY -- THE WAY OF HARMONY AND BEAUTY.

A CULTURE THAT RELIES PREDOMINATELY ON ORAL HISTORY TO CONTINUE ITS TRADITION FINDS THAT WHENEVER STORIES ARE

TOLD, THEY ARE CHANGED BY THE PERSONALITY OF THE STORY TELLER. EXCEPT FOR THE SACRED CEREMONIES THEMSELVES, WE MUST ASSUME THAT THE STORIES RECOUNTED IN NAVAJO HISTORY HAVE BEEN ELABORATED OVER THE YEARS, EXPANDED, AND OTHERWISE CHANGED FROM THE ORIGINAL ACCOUNTS.

WE MUST ALSO ASSUME THAT SOME STORIES ARE LOST FOREVER. A CONTEMPORARY WISE WOMAN OF A CANADIAN BORDER TRIBE REMARKED RECENTLY, "MAYBE WE SHOULD LET THE STORIES DIE. THEY MAY HAVE ENDED THEIR USEFULNESS."

NOW, AS TELEVISION AND RADIO PENETRATE INTO THE MOST REMOTE CORNERS AND THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN SETTLEMENTS OF THE NAVAJO NATION, AND HAVE THEIR IMPACT ON US ALL, IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECORD THE STORIES BEFORE THE ADVENT OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA, AND ITS INSIDIOUS EFFECT, TRANSFORMS THEM ONCE AGAIN.

TO PRODUCE THE BOOK NAVAJO HISTORY, I COLLECTED INFORMATION FROM A NUMBER OF QUALIFIED PEOPLE -- TRAINED

PEOPLE -- WHO HAD SPENT MANY HOURS IN LESSONS FROM WISE MEDICINE MEN. THESE PEOPLE ARE RECOGNIZED BY THE COMMUNITY AS HAVING LIVED THEIR LIVES AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO THE WAYS OF THE HOLY PEOPLE.

IT TOOK TWO YEARS, LONG HOURS, AND MANY CONVERSATIONS. I FELL IN LOVE WITH THE PRE-HISTORY PERIOD, AND WISHED PASSIONATELY TO BE ABLE TO TALK TO THE HOLY PEOPLE THEMSELVES. I FELT IMMENSELY PRIVILEGED TO WORK WITH THESE MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY -- TO GET INSIDE THE MINDS OF SUCH PEOPLE.

I BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT THERE ARE FEW QUALIFIED PEOPLE IN THE WORLD TODAY WHO ARE ABLE TO TRANSMIT THIS KIND OF INSIDE KNOWLEDGE EFFECTIVELY -- TO TRANSFER NOT JUST THE STORIES, BUT THE SPIRIT OF THE STORIES, TO THE PRINTED PAGE. THE STORIES FINALLY APPEARED IN BOOK FORM. STORIES THAT BY THEIR NATURE REQUIRE THE INTIMATE FORM OF A GIFTED STORY TELLER IN A SMALL GROUP ARE NOW IN BOOK FORM REACHING AN

AUDIENCE OF THOUSANDS -- CHILDREN, PARENTS, SCHOLARLY EXPERTS, AND AN OCCASIONAL INTERESTED bilagáanaa (ANGLO).

Navajo Wisdom as Found in Navajo Oral History

by Ethelou Yazzie

THE TOTAL BODY OF THE ORAL LITERATURE OF OUR PEOPLE IS VERY LARGE. GENERALLY THE STORIES FALL INTO TWO CATEGORIES: THERE ARE THE SACRED STORIES, INCLUDING THE EMERGENCE HISTORY, WHICH WOULD CORRESPOND TO THE VALUE CHRISTIANS PLACE ON THE BIBLE; AND THE FOLK TALES, OFTEN, BUT NOT ALWAYS, POINTING A MORAL.

THE NAVAJO SACRED STORIES TELL US THAT THE UNIVERSE HOLDS TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE. THERE ARE THE EARTH SURFACE PEOPLE -- BOTH LIVING AND DEAD -- AND THE HOLY PEOPLE -- THOSE POWERFUL, MYSTERIOUS BEINGS THAT BELONG TO THE SACRED WORLD. THE HOLY PEOPLE TRAVEL ON LIGHTNING, SUNBEAMS, AND RAINBOWS. WHILE THEY ARE VERY POWERFUL, THEY ARE NOT ALL-KNOWING, NOT ALL-POWERFUL, AND NOT ALL-GOOD. THEY MAKE

MISTAKES AND HAVE HUMAN EMOTIONS. THEY CAN BE INVOKED, SUPPLICATED, PROPITIATED, AND COERCED TO HELP THE PEOPLE OF THE TRIBE, OR TO CEASE DOING DAMAGE. THE HOLY PEOPLE ALSO SERVE AS IDEALS OF BEHAVIOR FOR THE NAVAJO PEOPLE TO FOLLOW OR EMULATE.

THE BASIC LESSONS TAUGHT BY THE SACRED STORIES ARE THESE:

1. THE UNIVERSE IS A VERY DANGEROUS PLACE.
2. TO SURVIVE YOU MUST MAINTAIN ORDER IN THOSE AREAS OF LIFE THAT YOU CAN CONTROL.
3. AVOID QUARRELING, AVOID EXCESS, AND STAY IN HARMONY WITH YOUR COMMUNITY AND WITH NATURE.
4. BE WARY OF NON-RELATIVES.
5. WHEN IN A NEW AND DANGEROUS SITUATION, DO NOTHING.
6. IF THE SITUATION IS REALLY DANGEROUS, ESCAPE.

ACCORDING TO OUR PRE-HISTORY, SQUABBLING AND QUARRELING

ARE THE WORST THINGS THAT CAN HAPPEN TO ANY SOCIETY. AT THE EARLIEST BEGINNINGS OF THE NAVAJO CREATION, WHILE THE FIRST PEOPLE WERE STILL MIST-PEOPLE WITHOUT FORM -- IN THE FIRST WORLD, THE BLACK WORLD, WHERE THERE WERE COLORS BUT NO LIGHT -- THE INSECT BEINGS HAD ALREADY DEVELOPED A WAY OF LIFE BECAUSE THEY REOOGNIZED THE VALUE OF MAKING AND CARRYING OUT PLANS WITH THE APPROVAL OF ONE ANOTHER.

SPIDERS, ANTS, WASPPPEOPLE, BLACK ANTS, BEETLES, DRAGON FLIES AND BATS LIVED IN THE FIRST WORLD AND WERE ABLE TO COOPERATE WITH THEIR OWN KIND, THOUGH THEY FOUGHT WITH ONE ANOTHER.

I WANT TO EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL NAVAJO BELIEF. WOMEN HAVE ALWAYS OCCUPIED CENTRAL POSITIONS IN OUR LITERATURE AND TRADITION. WOMEN OWN THE LAND, AND THE HERDS. THE CHILDREN THAT ARE BORN TO A COUPLE ARE BORN TO THE CLAN OF THEIR MOTHER. SINCE PREHISTORIC TIMES,

WOMEN HAVE HELD AN EQUAL POSITION WITH MEN BOTH IN ACCOMPLISHMENT AND POWER -- EARTHLY AND SUPERNATURAL.

APPROPRIATELY, WE WILL BEGIN WITH FIRST WOMAN, A'łtsé Asdzą́ą́. WHEN THE YELLOW CLOUD AND THE BLUE CLOUD MET ON THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE FIRST WORLD, FIRST WOMAN WAS FORMED. WITH HER CAME A PERFECT EAR OF YELLOW CORN, WHITE SHELL AND TURQUOISE.

FIRST WOMAN IS THE HOLY PERSON WHO IS PART OF, AND RESPONSIBLE FOR, THE FIRST CREATION. SHE IS THE ONE WHO BROUGHT THE WESTERN HALF OF THE WORLD TO MEET MAN'S EASTERN HALF. SHE LITERALLY PULLED THE WORLD TOGETHER IN THE FIRST HUMAN AGREEMENT TO COOPERATE AND COUPLE.

THE STORY TELLS US: IN THE FIRST WORLD, FIRST MAN, A'łtsé Hastiin, BURNED A CRYSTAL FOR FIRE. THE CRYSTAL BELONGED TO THE MIND AND WAS OF CLEAR SEEING. WHEN FIRST MAN BURNED THE CRYSTAL IT WAS THE MIND'S AWAKENING. FIRST

WOMAN BURNED TURQUOISE. IT WAS NOT AS STRONG AS THE MAN'S FIRE. IN THE FIRST DISCUSSION AND AGREEMENT AMONG THE HOLY PEOPLE, FIRST MAN ASKED FIRST WOMAN TO COME LIVE WITH HIM, AND SHE AGREED. BUT ALL THE BEINGS FOUGHT AMONG THEMSELVES AND THE ENTIRE CLOUD OF BEINGS MOVED UPWARD INTO THE BLUE WORLD.

IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE PEOPLE MOVED INTO THE FOURTH WORLD THAT THEY LEARNED TO DISCUSS THINGS AND COOPERATE WITH ONE ANOTHER. DISSATISFACTION WITH EVIL AND SUFFERING, LED THE PEOPLE IN OUR HISTORY TO SEEK A MEANS TO LIFT THEMSELVES UP TO A WORLD OF BETTER CONDITIONS. EVIL CONTINUES TO EXIST IN EACH SUCCESSIVE WORLD. EVERYTHING HAS ITS OPPOSITE. EVIL CANNOT OVERCOME GOOD, BUT IS EVER PRESENT. THE DESTRUCTIVE FORCES THAT ARE UNLEASHED BY FOLLOWING A NEGATIVE SELFISH PATH ARE RESTORED TO HARMONY WHEN MAN HAS THE WILL TO WALK THE PATH OF BEAUTY.

EACH MOVE TO A NEW WORLD INVOLVES LARGER GROUPS OF BEINGS -- BOTH ANIMAL AND HUMAN -- AND REPRESENTS MORE HARMONY IN ACTION AMONG THE BEINGS. WE CAN SEE THE PEOPLE MOVE TOWARD A MORE PERFECT SITUATION AWAY FROM QUARRELING AND TOWARD HARMONY.

THE STORIES OF THE HOLY PEOPLE DIFFER FROM STORY TELLER TO STORY TELLER, AND FROM TIME TO TIME. THE STORIES WE PRINTED, FOR INSTANCE, REPRESENT THE STORIES THAT WERE BEING TOLD AROUND ROUGH ROCK, ARIZONA AT THAT TIME (1970-71). THERE ARE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OUR PRINTED HISTORY AND THE STORIES THAT VARIOUS SOCIAL SCIENTISTS RECORDED IN OTHER PLACES IN EARLIER YEARS. STILL, THE OUTSTANDING LESSON REMAINS THE SAME.

THE WISE COURSE OF ACTION IS THAT WHICH MOST AGREE TO BE WISE. AGREEMENT CAN TAKE A GREAT DEAL OF TIME. NOT ONLY MUST THE MAJORITY AGREE, BUT THOSE IN THE MINORITY MUST BE CONVINCED OR RESIGNED TO THE COURSE OF ACTION BEFORE

ANY COURSE CAN BE FOLLOWED. IT IS NOT A MAJORITY RULE SYSTEM THAT CAN BE DECIDED BY SIMPLE VOTE, SUCH AS THE AMERICAN SYSTEM. THE NAVAJO WILL NOT PROCEED EITHER IN HIS PRE-HISTORY OR IN CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE UNTIL HE KNOWS THAT EVERYONE AGREES EXACTLY AS TO HOW THINGS SHOULD AND WILL BE DONE. THIS PERIOD OF DISCUSSION AND PERSUASION MAY TAKE HOURS, DAYS, WEEKS, MONTHS, OR YEARS. IN OUR ORAL HISTORY IT CAN TAKE EONS.

THIS DOMINANT TRAIT OF THE NAVAJO HAS CONFOUNDED SOLDIERS, SPANIARDS, MISSIONARIES AND THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS. IT CONTINUES TO CONFOUND ANY PERSON, AGENCY, OR ORGANIZATION THAT IS ACCUSTOMED TO GETTING THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF ACTION IN THE SHORTEST PERIOD OF TIME.

THE CONSTANT SEARCH FOR HARMONY AND THE NEED FOR ORDER IS REFLECTED IN THE FIRST STORIES OF THE FOURTH WORLD. IT IS A TOUCHING ACCOUNT OF A PEOPLE'S COMING TO GRIPS WITH

THE NEED TO COOPERATE IN ORDER TO SURVIVE. THE METHOD THE NAVAJO CHOSE WAS COMMUNITY AGREEMENT, RATHER THAN SOME FORM OF AUTHORITY CONTROL. THE RESULT OF THIS DECISION IS A PEOPLE WHO PLACE GREAT VALUE ON SELF-RELIANCE, BUT ALSO REQUIRE THAT INDIVIDUAL INDEPENDENCE MUST FIND AN OUTLET THAT REFLECTS A BALANCE WITHIN THE FAMILY, CLAN, AND TRIBE.

OUR STORIES TELL US THAT BY THE TIME THAT OUR ANCESTOR PEOPLE HAD REACHED THE FOURTH WORLD, THEY WERE READY FOR SOME ORDER IN THEIR LIVES.

TO ACHIEVE ORDER, THERE WERE MANY DISCUSSIONS ABOUT MANY ESSENTIAL THINGS. THERE IS A LONG DISCUSSION ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO MAKE A FIRE, FOR INSTANCE. HAVING DISCOVERED THAT ONE OF THE PEOPLE HAD BROUGHT FLINT WITH HIM FROM THE THIRD WORLD, THE PEOPLE GATHER WOOD FROM FOUR DIRECTIONS: PINON, PINE, JUNIPER AND SPRUCE. THE FLAME CAUGHT, BUT THE FIRE SPUTTERED, SNAPPED AND FRIGHTENED THE PEOPLE. FINALLY

ONE OF THE UNNAMED HEROES OF NAVAJO HISTORY POKES THE FIRE WITH A BRANCH FROM A TREE, AND TAMES THE BLAZE. HEHHAS INVENTED THE POKER, AND CONTROLLED A POWERFUL ELEMENT IN THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE.

I INCLUDE THIS STORY BECAUSE IT IS ONE OF THE FEW IN WHICH INSIGHT INTO A PROBLEM IS ONE PERSON'S SOLUTION. GENERALLY, IT IS BY COMMUNITY CONSENT OR SOME SUPERNATURAL POWER THAT ONE DISCOVERS THE SOLUTION TO A DILEMMA.

TALKING GOD, Haasch'éélti'í, FOR INSTANCE, WAS THE ARCHITECT OF THE NAVAJO HOGAN. THE PEOPLE BUILD THE HOGAN ACCORDING TO TALKING GOD'S DIRECTIONS, AND IT TAKES SHAPE QUICKLY. BUT TALKING GOD DID NOT SAY WHERE HE WANTED THE DOOR. EVENTUALLY IT IS DECIDED THAT SINCE ALL PRAYERS AND SONGS START IN THE EAST, THE DOORWAY OF THE HOGAN SHOULD ALSO FACE EAST. PRAGMATICALLY, SINCE THE PREVAILING WINDS BRING FIERCE SANDSTORMS AND BLIZZARDS FROM THE WEST, THIS

IS A HIGHLY PRACTICAL DIRECTION FOR THE DOOR TO FACE.

ABOUT TALKING GOD. HE IS THE POWER THAT IS LIFE, WHO IS SPIRIT, WHO WAS CREATED FOR GOOD, FOR BEAUTY, HARMONY AND BLESSING. IT IS HE WHO RESTORES US. IT IS WITH HIS FEET, WITH HIS BODY, WITH HIS VOICE AND WITH HIS MIND THAT WE WALK AS WE ARE RESTORED IN THE CEREMONIES OF HEALING. IT IS TALKING GOD WHO GAVE MAN THE GOOD PATH BY WHICH HE SHOULD GOVERN HIMSELF.

ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS THE PEOPLE HAD TO DO WHEN THEY REACHED THE FOURTH WORLD WAS TO STRAIGHTEN OUT THE NIGHT AND DAY, AND ORDER THE SEASONS, SO THAT THERE WOULD BE A PATTERN TO THEIR LIVES.

ONCE THE SUN HAD BEEN MADE OF TURQUOISE, AND MARKED WITH A NOSE, EYES AND MOUTH, AND STREAKED WITH YELLOW, AND WRAPPED IN TWELVE UNWOUNDED BUCKSKINS, THERE WAS A VERY LONG DISCUSSION OF ALL THE BEINGS. NOT JUST THE PEOPLE, BUT ALL

LIVING THINGS IN THE FOURTH WORLD HAD TO AGREE ON SOMETHING AS IMPORTANT AS THE SUN.

SOME THOUGHT THE SUN SHOULD BE PLACED ON THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN, BUT EVENTUALLY IT WAS DECIDED TO PLACE THE SUN IN THE SKY. THEN THERE WAS THE QUESTION OF HOW THE SUN SHOULD MOVE. SHOULD IT MOVE UP AND DOWN? SHOULD IT MOVE IN A CIRCLE AROUND THE SKY AND NEVER SET? FINALLY ALL AGREED THE BEST THING WOULD BE FOR IT TO MOVE FROM EAST TO WEST TO GIVE LIGHT ALL OVER THE WORLD. WE CAN ONLY BEGIN TO GUESS HOW LONG IT TOOK FOR ALL THE LIVING CREATURES TO AGREE ON A PROBLEM OF SUCH MAGNITUDE.

THE EARLY PEOPLE MUST HAVE HAD FUN NAMING ALL THE THINGS IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT -- STARS, CLOUDS. THE NAVAJO NAMES FOR THINGS ARE NOT ARBITRARY SOUNDS, BUT THE WORDS TAKE FORM ACCORDING TO THE FUNCTION OF THE THING NAMED.

IN THE STORY OF THE PLACEMENT OF THE STARS IN THE

HEAVENS. WE FIND THE PEOPLE DISCUSSING, AGREEING, DISAGREEING, NAMING, AND WE INTRODUCE ANOTHER ELEMENT -- COYOTE.

> "THE PEOPLE HAD THE SAME LIGHT AS THEY HAD IN THE WORLDS BELOW, BUT THEY WANTED A STRONGER LIGHT TO AWAKEN THEM IN THE MORNING, AND THEY WANTED A LIGHT AT NIGHT. ALSO, THE PEOPLE WISHED TO STRAIGHTEN OUT THE NIGHT AND THE DAY SO THAT THERE WOULD BE SOME ORDER IN THEIR LIVES.
>
> THEY LAID STARS ON A BLANKET ON THE GROUND. BLACK GOD PLACED THE NORTH STAR. FIRST MAN PLACED THE BIG DIPPER WHILE FIRST WOMAN PUT THE LITTLE DIPPER INTO THE SKY. FIRST MAN ALSO PLACED THE SEVEN STARS WHICH BLACK GOD CLAIMED REPRESENTED PARTS OF HIS BODY. WHEN FIRST MAN AND FIRST WOMAN HAD NAMED THE MAIN STARS AND PLACED THEM IN THE SKY, THEY INSTRUCTED THE STARS TO GUARD THE SKY AND MAN.
>
> BEFORE FIRST MAN WAS FINISHED PLACING EACH STAR IN A PARTICULAR PRESELECTED PLACE IN THE SKY, COYOTE CAME ALONG AND ASKED WHAT THEY WERE DOING. COYOTE PICKED UP A STAR AND PUT IT INTO THE SOUTH AND SAID IT WAS

HIS MORNING STAR."

LATER, AFTER HAVING PLACED HIS STAR, COYOTE WANDERS AWAY. HE COMES BACK DAYS? YEARS? LATER TO DISCOVER THE PEOPLE STILL NAMING AND PLACING THE STARS. IMPATIENTLY, HE GRABS A CORNER OF THE BLANKET AND FLIPS THE WHOLE STAR SCHEME INTO THE SKY.

FIRST MAN IS ANGRY AND SCOLDS COYOTE. THEY WERE NOT YET FINISHED. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BETTER IF --. COYOTE SHRUGS AND WALKS AWAY, SATISFIED THAT HE HAS DONE A GOOD JOB.

SINCE EVERYTHING WAS NOT IN PLACE OR IN ORDER IN THE WORLD, COYOTE HAD TO DOUBLE CHECK ALL THE ACTIONS OF THE FIRST PEOPLE. THIS CONTINUES THROUGHOUT HISTORY. COYOTE ZIGZAGS FROM RIGHT TO WRONG, FROM OBEDIENCE TO DISOBEDIANCE. HE CHALLENGES EACH NEW ACTION, EACH NEW MODE OF BEHAVIOR. HE MAKES THE PEOPLE TEST EVERYTHING REPEATEDLY TO SEE WHETHER IT IS WORKABLE IN ALL SITUATIONS.

THE NAVAJO CONSIDERS THE COYOTE A LONER, USING CLEVER, SHREWD, AND OFTEN COMICAL MEANS TO GAIN HIS HIGHLY PERSONAL ENDS. WE HAVE STORIES ABOUT COYOTE. THESE ARE TOLD AS CHILDREN'S STORIES TO TEACH THE MORAL VALUES OF OUR PEOPLE. THE STORIES TELL OF COYOTE'S ADVENTURES THAT ILLUSTRATE HIS ANTI-SOCIAL AND COMICAL SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS. HE ALWAYS HAS TO PAY WHEN HIS TRICKY, SELFISH WAYS, HIS ENVY, GREED, AND LUST DO NOT BRING HIM THE GOOD THAT HE DESIRES.

THERE IS A CARTOON SERIES ON TELEVISION THAT IS CALLED "THE ROADRUNNER AND COYOTE". IN THIS SERIES ELABORATE SCHEMES BY THE COYOTE TO CATCH THE ROADRUNNER ALWAYS RESULT IN BODILY HARM TO THE COYOTE. THESE CARTOONS PARALLEL HIS POSITION AS CLOWN IN NAVAJO LITERATURE. HIS INDIVIDUAL ANTI-SOCIAL BRILLIANCE IS HIS DOWNFALL.

ONE OF THE EARLIEST MENTIONS OF COYOTE IN NAVAJO ORAL HISTORY (AS APART FROM FOLK TALES) IS IN THE ROLE HE

TAKES IN THE SECOND WORLD, WHEN CURIOUS AND ALONE, HE EXPLORES AND FINDS SUFFERING EVERYWHERE. IN THE THIRD WORLD, IT IS HIS INTERFERENCE WITH THE WATER MONSTER'S BABY THAT CAUSES THE FLOOD THAT FORCED THE PEOPLE TO FLEE THROUGH THE REED INTO THE FOURTH WORLD, OR THE PRESENT WORLD AS WE KNOW IT.

> "COYOTE'S POSITION IN THE ASSEMBLY OF THE GODS MATCHES HIS ROLE ELSEWHERE. THEORETICALLY, THERE ARE ONLY TWO CHOICES, THE GOOD REPRESENTED BY THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE ASSEMBLY, AND THE EVIL REPRESENTED BY THE NORTH SIDE. COYOTE TAKES HIS PLACE NEAR THE DOOR SO THAT HE MAY ALLY HIMSELF WITH EITHER SIDE ACCORDING TO HIS WHIM (IN GAMBLING). . . . COYOTE USUALLY LOSES, FOR HIS JUDGEMENT LEADS HIM TO THE FLASHY SIDE, AND IN NAVAJO LORE IT IS THE MODEST SIDE THAT WINS".

BY ALLOWING THE COYOTE TO IMPULSIVELY SOLVE SOME PROBLEMS, OR BY LETTING HIM HAVE HIS OWN WAY, CERTAIN DIFFICULTIES CAN BE RESOLVED WITHOUT DISCUSSION. BUT

THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THAT SOLUTION REMAINS WITH THE COYOTE, AND IS NOT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PEOPLE.

THE COYOTE IS ALSO USEFUL FOR DOING THINGS AND GOING PLACES WHICH ALL OTHER REASONABLE HUMAN BEINGS FEAR. WHEN SOME PEOPLE DIED WHILE OTHERS WERE DISCUSSING HOW TO BUILD A HOGAN . . .

> "NO ONE KNEW WHAT TO DO, SO THEY ASKED COYOTE. THEY TOLD HIM THEY WERE LEAVING IT UP TO HIM TO DECIDED
>
> COYOTE DECIDED THAT HE WOULD TAKE A BLACK ROCK AND GO TO BLACK WATER LAKE TO REINFORCE HIS DECISION REGARDING DEAD PERSONS. THERE HE WOULD THROW THE ROCK INTO THE LAKE. IF THE ROCK CAME UP AND FLOATED, THE SPIRITS OF THE DEAD PERSONS WOULD GO UP AND THERE WOULD BE NO DEATH. IF IT SANK, THE SPIRITS WOULD GO TO THE WORLD BELOW, AND THERE WOULD BE DEATH. WHEN COYOTE WENT TO THE LAKE AND THREW THE ROCK, IT SANK. THAT IS WHY THE SPIRITS OF THE DEAD ALWAYS GO TO THE WORLD BELOW.

TWO DAYS AFTER THE PERSONS DIED, TWO MEN LOOKED DOWN THE HOLE THROUGH WHICH THEY HAD COME UP INTO THE FOURTH WORLD AND THEY DID NOT SEE ANYTHING. TWO DAYS LATER, THEY LOOKED AGAIN. THIS TIME THEY SAW THE DEAD PERSONS SITTING AND COMBING THEIR HAIR. THEY TOLD THE OTHER PEOPLE WHAT THEY HAD SEEN

COYOTE ACTED TOTALLY ON HIS OWN WITHOUT CONSULTING ANYONE ELSE. EVEN THOUGH THE MATTERS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SETTLED, WE ARE LEFT WITH AN AMBIGUITY. ARE THE PEOPLE DEAD, OR ARE THEY ALIVE IN THE PRECEDING WORLD? SINCE WE CAN NEVER TRUST COYOTE, WE CAN GO ON BELIEVING WHATEVER WE WANT TO BELIEVE REGARDING DEATH. THIS WAY ALL SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT, EVEN THAT OF THE MISSIONARY, CAN BE ACCOMMODATED.

ONCE THE PEOPLE HAD PUT THINGS IN THE UNIVERSE TOGETHER TO THEIR OWN SATISFACTION, THEY MADE UP THE SHOE GAME. (NOT EVERYTHING CAN BE SERIOUS EVEN WHEN YOU ARE MAKING HISTORY). NOW EACH ANIMAL HAS ITS OWN SONG. THERE IS AN OWL SONG, A BEAR SONG, A TURKEY SONG. THIS SONG DETERMINES

WHICH TEAM WILL START THE GAME:

łid bao ó 'oo
łid bao ó oo
néí náá tsi'da
na hot'in yęęgi
jádí náagha
o o woo hái

NOW THE MOCCASIN GAME HAD A VERY SERIOUS PURPOSE. THAT WAS TO DETERMINE WHICH ANIMALS WOULD WALK DURING THE DAY, AND WHICH WOULD BE THE CREATURES OF THE NIGHT. SO TO SEE WHICH ANIMALS GOT THE NIGHT SHIFT, THEY BEGAN THEIR GAME.

THE RULES WERE MADE BY ONE WALKING GIANT, WHO HAD AN EAGLE FEATHER IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND. FROM THE FEATHER SHONE A FAINT RAY OF LIGHT LIKE AN ALMOST INVISIBLE RAINBOW. THIS RAY OF LIGHT WOULD HELP HIM KNOW WHICH MOCCASIN HAD A BALL HIDDEN IN IT.

ONE WALKING GIANT BROUGHT 102 YUCCA COUNTERS WITH HIM.

THESE WRE USED TO KEEP SCORE. THE NUMBER CAME FROM THE 102 SUN RAYS. WHEN ONE SIDE GETS 102 POINTS, THAT SIDE WINS THE GAME.

THE ANIMALS AND THE HOLY PEOPLE PLAYED THE GAME ALL NIGHT, BUT NEITHER SIDE WON ALL THE COUNTERS. SINCE NEITHER SIDE WON, WE HAVE BOTH NIGHT AND DAY. SO IN THE MORNING, THE PEOPLE WENT ON THEIR OWN WAY ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN NATURE. THIS WAS THE LAST TIME ALL WERE TOGETHER.

FIRST MAN AND FIRST WOMAN DECIDED WHEN THE SEASONS WERE TO BE, AND GAVE THE LIGHTNING PEOPLE A TIME TO COME. AFTER WINTER, THEY WERE TO WAKE EVERYONE SO THAT ALL WOULD KNOW THAT SPRING HAD COME. THE LIGHTNING PEOPLE ALSO HAD TO WARN THE PEOPLE THAT WINTER WAS NOT YET HERE, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT TELL STORIES AT THE WRONG TIME OF THE YEAR.

FOR THE FIRST PLANTING, FIRST MAN CONTRIBUTED THE WHITE CORN THAT HE HAD ALWAYS HAD. FIRST WOMAN GAVE THE

YELLOW CORN. TURKEY DANCED BACK AND FORTH FOUR TIMES, AND OUT OF HIS FEATHER COAT DROPPED FOUR KERNELS OF CORN WHICH WERE GRAY, BLUE, AND BLACK AND RED. BIG SNAKE BROUGHT FOUR SEEDS WHICH WERE THE PUMPKIN, THE WATERMELON, THE CANTALOUPE AND THE MUSKMELON. THE HARVEST FROM THESE SEEDS WAS VERY LARGE.

THE UNIVERSE IN ORDER, AND THE HARVEST DONE, FIRST MAN AND FIRST WOMAN WERE READY TO RAISE A CHILD. THE CHILD THAT THEY RAISED WAS FOUND ON Ch;o;i/i.(GOBERNADOR KNOB). SHE IS CALLED CHANGING WOMAN -- OR WHITE SHELL WOMAN.

THE CHILD WAS BORN OF DARKNESS AND THE DAWN WAS HER FATHER. SALT WOMAN AND COYOTE HELPED RAISE HER. THEY FED HER ON SUN RAY POLLEN, POLLEN FROM THE CLOUDS, POLLEN FROM THE PLANTS AND THE DEW OF FLOWERS.

WHEN SHE BECAME OF AGE SHE HAD HER CELEBRATION. THE FIRST CELEBRATION KNOWN AS Kinaaldáa(THE WALK INTO BEAUTY).

THE SAME CEREMONY IS GIVEN TODAY FOR NAVAJO GIRLS WHEN THEY REACH PUBERTY, EXCEPT THAT CHANGING WOMAN LAY ON A PILE OF BLANKETS FACING WEST, WHEREAS TODAY THE GIRL MUST FACE THE EAST SO THAT SHE CAN SEE THE EARTH AND SKY.

THE HOLY PEOPLE WHO WERE LIVING ON THE EARTH AT THAT TIME PERFORMED THE CEREMONY FOR CHANGING WOMAN. THEY DID THIS SO THAT SHE WOULD BE ABLE TO HAVE CHILDREN.

WHEN SHE WAS GROWN INTO WOMANHOOD SHE BORE TWIN SONS WHO WERE TO BECOME SAVIORS OF THE PEOPLE. AS THEY GREW, THEY ASKED OVER AND OVER AGAIN, "WHO IS OUR FATHER?" BUT SHE NEVER LET THEM KNOW.

ONE DAY THE TWINS WERE OUT WALKING AND PASSED A HOLE IN THE GROUND FROM WHICH SMOKE ROSE. THE BOYS CLIMBED DOWN THE HOLE AND FOUND A WOMAN WITH SPIDER WEBS ALL OVER THE WALLS AND CEILING. IN THE WEBS WERE FEATHERS FROM ALL KINDS OF BIRDS. (COLLECTING FEATHERS WAS SPIDER WOMAN'S

HOBBY). SHE KNEW THE BOYS WERE GOING TO COME, AND SHE KNEW WHY THEY WERE THERE. SHE TOLD THEM ALL THE THINGS THEY WOULD NEED TO KNOW TO FIND THEIR FATHER, THE SUN.

SPIDER WOMAN WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST WOMEN OF ALL TIME. TODAY SHE WOULD BE A SCIENTIFIC OR ENGINEERING GENIUS. SHE COULD FORSEE EVENTS, KNOW PLANS, UNDERSTAND THE LAWS OF NATURE. SPIDER WOMAN WAS ABLE TO INTERPRET NATURAL LAW, AND PUT IT TO USE FOR THE NAVAJO PEOPLE.

"ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY," SHE TOLD THE TWINS, "IT WON'T TAKE A DAY, BUT A LONG, LONG TIME."

WE KNOW THAT EPIC JOURNEYS IN ALL LITERATURE ARE A METAPHOR FOR LIFE, AND IN FINDING AND SEARCHING FOR THEIR FATHER, THE BOYS ALSO FIND THEIR STRENGTH AND THEIR IDENTITY, AND THE STRENGTH OF THE PEOPLE AT THE SAME TIME.

WE FIND THAT THIS IS ALSO THE STORY OF MAN'S JOURNEY UPWARD, WITH ALL OF ITS OBSTACLES AND DANGERS IN SEARCH OF

THE HEAVENLY FATHER WITHIN. THE POWER THAT WE CALL TALKING GOD.

THE EARTH IS OUR MOTHER, AND THE SUN IS OUR FATHER. OUR HERO TWINS WERE THE SUN'S CHILDREN. THE GREAT DESIRE OF MONSTER SLAYER AND CHILD BORN FOR WATER WAS TO RID THE EARTH OF THE MONSTERS AND GIANTS THAT WERE ROAMING THE EARTH AND TERRORIZING THE PEOPLE. THEIR LIFETIME JOURNEY WAS TO FIND THEIR FATHER TO GET THE WEAPONS THEY NEEDED TO KILL THE GIANTS. THEIR ADVENTURES AND SUCCESSES IN THIS MISSION IS ONE OF THE FAVORITE STORIES OF MY PEOPLE.

THE TWINS SET OFF ON THEIR JOURNEY. WHEN THEY CAME TO THE CUTTING REEDS THAT HAD KILLED OTHER TRAVELERS, THEY KNEW THE CHANTS AND PRAYERS THAT WOULD SAVE THEM. SPIDER WOMAN HAD TAUGHT THEM ALL THE THINGS THEY NEEDED TO KNOW. AS THEY PRAYED AND CHANTED, THE CUTTING REEDS GREW SOFT PLUMES, AND PARTED TO LET THEM DRINK THE WATER THEY NEEDED

TO CONTINUE THEIR JOURNEY.

WHEN THEY CAME TO THE HIGH DUNES OF SHIFTING AND MOVING SAND THAT HAD BURIED OTHERS, THEY KNEW THE CHANTS AND PRAYERS THAT WOULD SAVE THEM. WHEN THEY CAME TO THE CANYON WITH THE "CLOSING IN WALLS", THEY FLOATED THROUGH THE CANYON ON THE MAGIC FEATHERS THAT SPIDER WOMAN HAD GIVEN THEM.

DISREGARDING SPIDER WOMAN'S WARNINGS, THEY CHOSE THE BROAD SHADY TRAIL ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE FOUR PILLARS OF ROCK. AS THEY PASSED THE FIRST PILLAR, THEY SAW THAT SOME OF THEIR HAIRS BECAME TIPPED WITH WHITE. AFTER THEY PASSED THE SECOND PILLAR THERE WERE GRAY STREAKS THAT WERE VERY NOTICEABLE. A PROTECTIVE MESSENGER TOLD THEM TO CHANGE THEIR COURSE, AND THEY PASSED THE LAST TWO PILLARS ON THE STEEP SUNNY SIDE, ON A NARROW AND SHEER TRAIL. THE TWINS REALIZED THAT IF THEY HAD NOT CHANGED COURSE THEY WOULD HAVE DIED OF OLD AGE.

MEASURING WORM CARRIED THE NOW MIDDLE AGED TWINS ACROSS THE "WASH THAT SWALLOWED". THEY JUST HUNG ON HIS BACK, AND HE SPRANG RIGHT ACROSS.

BEYOND THE PLACE KNOWN AS "DARKNESS", THEY RODE THE WATER STRIDERS ACROSS THE OCEAN TO THE HOME OF THE SUN. THERE THEY FACED MANY TESTS BEFORE THE SUN WOULD RECOGNIZE THEM AS HIS CHILDREN. THANKS TO SPIDER WOMAN'S BRIEFING SESSIONS, THEY SUCCEEDED IN ALL THE TASKS THAT WERE SET FOR THEM.

THE BOYS WERE GIVEN SUITS OF FLINT ARMOR, THE OLDER IN DARK FLINT AND THE YOUNGER IN BLUE FLINT. THE SUN AGREED TO GIVE THEM LIGHTNING TO USE AS WEAPONS IN KILLING THE MONSTERS, THOUGH HE REMINDS THE TWINS THAT HE IS SAD ABOUT THEIR MISSION AS THE MONSTERS ARE HIS CHILDREN TOO.

THE TWINS RETURN TO EARTH, AND FULFILL THEIR MISSION, IN A LONG SAGA OF THE KILLING OF EACH DIFFERENT KIND OF

MONSTER AND GIANT.

THE NAVAJO ALWAYS HAS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN THE CONFLICTING FORCES IN HIS LIFE. THIS INTERMEDIARY CAN PULL THINGS INTO PLACE. THE INTERMEDIARY CAN PROVIDE ORDER FROM CHAOS, AND IS NOT LIMITED BY TIME OR SPACE.

SPIDER WOMAN KNEW THE LAWS OF NATURE THOROUGHLY. SHE WAS ABLE TO INTERPRET THESE LAWS AND PUT THEM TO WORK FOR THE NAVAJO PEOPLE. ONCE SPIDER WOMAN'S WORK WAS DONE -- HAVING SET THE TWINS ON THEIR WAY TO THEIR FATHER WITH THE TOOLS THEY NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH THEIR TASK -- SHE MOVES OUT OF THE PICTURE.

OUR HOLY PEOPLE HAVE LIMITED TERMS OF OFFICE. THEIR TIME AND EXISTENCE IS DETERMINED ON DIFFERENT LEVELS ACCORDING TO THEIR DUTIES AND THEIR GIFTS. THEY DO THEIR JOBS AT THE PROPER TIME AND IN THE PROPER WAY.

AS A NAVAJO, I KNOW THAT THE HOLY PEOPLE HAVE THEIR

HOMES AT THE FOUR SACRED MOUNTAINS. I CAN REACH THEM THROUGH MEDICINE MEN. OUR MEDICINE MEN GO THROUGH A LONG AND RIGOROUS TRAINING PERIOD -- A LIFETIME OF TRAINING, REALLY -- AND THEY ARE GIFTED WITH THE POWER TO RESTORE ME TO THE RIGHT WAY THROUGH PRAYER, SACRED SONGS, CHANTS AND INTRICATE RITES.

MY NEED, OR ILLNESS, MAY REQUIRE ONE SHORT THIRTY MINUTE PRAYER, OR A MULTI-NIGHT CEREMONIAL EVENT. WHATEVER IT IS, MY MEDICINE MAN, LIKE SPIDER WOMAN WITH THE TWINS, WILL KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT I NEED AND WILL SEE THAT IT IS DONE.

IN THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF OUR CEREMONIES, THE NINE NIGHT CHANT, DANCERS, MASKED AS PERSONIFICATIONS OF THE HOLY PEOPLE OR DIVINE POWERS, ARE LED BY TALKING GOD, WEARING A HEAD DRESS OF TWELVE WHITE EAGLE FEATHERS. THIS IS A HEALING CEREMONY OF BLESSING WAY AND IS HELD AT HOME, IN VARIOUS PLACES IN THE WINTER MONTHS.

THE FINAL SONG, AT DAWN OF THE LAST DAY WHEN THE YEIS, THE DANCERS, TAKE LEAVE, IS THE BLUEBIRD CHANT. IT IS THE SONG, THE MOMENT THAT ALL THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE COME TO SEE THE CEREMONY AND PARTICIPATE IN ITS BLESSING, HAVE WAITED FOR. CORN POLLEN IS THROWN UPON THE DANCERS AS THEY LEAVE SINGING THIS BLUEBIRD CHANT WHICH EXPRESSES THE BLESSING AND JOY OF HARMONY, AND HEALTH RESTORED, THE JOY OF LIFE. WE REMEMBERSTOO, THAT TALKING GOD TOLD US, THAT WHEN WE SHOULD SEE BLUEBIRDS OR OTHER SONGBIRDS THAT WE WOULD KNOW HE WAS NEAR.

THIS IS CALLED BLESSING WAY, THAT WAS GIVEN BY TALKING GOD AT THE PLACE OF EMERGENCE INTO THIS WORLD. AT THIS NEW BEGINNING THE YEI TOOK THEIR LEAVE AND TOLD US THAT WE WOULD NOT SEE THEM ANY MORE. THE SONG BIRDS REMIND US OF THEIR PRESENCE.